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SENATOR THE HON. GARETH EVANS Q.C.

MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE
PARLIAMENT HOUSE
CANBERRA A.C.T. 2600

Senator Sid Spindler
Commonwealth Parliament Offices
400 Flinders Street
Melbourne Vic 3000

Dear Senator Spindler

You will recall that in December last year you brought to my attention the apparent disappearance of two East Timorese students, Emilio Pereira and Nazario Magno, while travelling to their high school in Dili. Z

As foreshadowed, the Australian Embassy in Jakarta made enquiries with independent sources in Jakarta and Dili about the welfare of these two students. Experience has shown that consulting such sources is often the best way of obtaining information in specific human rights cases. In this instance, however, the Embassy's enquiries did not reveal anything - our sources had no record or knowledge of either of the two students.

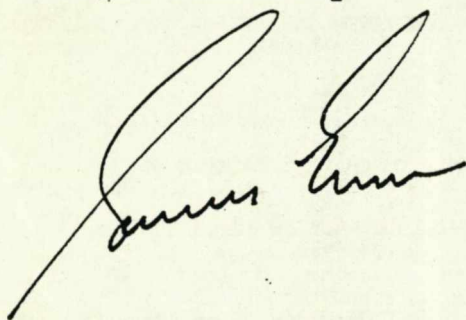
In light of the above I have instructed Embassy officials to themselves make further informal enquiries in East Timor at the first available opportunity. (The enquiries made so far by Embassy officials did not include actually visiting the province themselves). They have undertaken to do so when they accompany the Australian Parliamentary Delegation to East Timor 7-9 February, assuming that the busy schedule of the Delegation allows this. Should further information emerge from these enquiries I will of course pass that information to you.

At this stage I would not propose raising the matter with the Indonesian authorities. I believe that the Australian Government's long term credibility as an advocate for human rights in Indonesia is best maintained by restricting ourselves to those cases where we have reasonably specific details of what occurred and preferably where the allegation has been confirmed by an independent source. As for contacting the Indonesian Government to check the veracity of the allegations, experience has shown that this rarely results in any useful information becoming available.

In addition, giving the students' names to the Indonesian Government may result in unwarranted and unwelcome attention from the authorities and could prove counter-productive for the individuals in question.

As you are aware, the Government raises its concern with the Indonesian authorities whenever we become aware of a general deterioration in the human rights situation. Both Ambassador Flood and I have done so several times over the past few months following reports of such a deterioration in East Timor and the province of Aceh. My understanding is that in East Timor at least there has been something of an improvement in the situation over the past two months, with the release of people detained as a result of the September/October unrest commencing in early December. While this is a welcome development the Government will continue to monitor the situation and make representations where appropriate.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gareth Evans', with a large, sweeping initial 'G'.

GARETH EVANS